

# **DISCOVERING THE MULTIFACETED ELEMENTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC LITERATURE THROUGH CONTEMPORARY POETRY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

A Dissertation Submitted  
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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “Discovering the multifaceted elements of COVID-19 Pandemic literature through contemporary poetry: A critical analysis” submitted by Sibani Behera for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English is the result of original research carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation has not been submitted in part or in full for any Degree or Diploma to this University or to any other University.

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Sibani Behera, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “Discovering the multifaceted elements of COVID-19 Pandemic literature through contemporary poetry; A critical analysis”, is an original piece of work and has not been submitted to any other university to the best of my knowledge. It is in the partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English of Rama Devi Women's University for the session 2021-2024.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper acts as a reflection that encapsulates the elements of Pandemic literature through examining the poems such as *In The Time Of Pandemic* by Kitty O' Meara, *Pandemic* by Joseph Goldstein, *The Same Boat* and *What If It's Just Nature?* by Julie Sheldon, *Change* by James Pertwee and *We Fell Asleep In One World And Woke Up In Another* by Haroon Rashid.

Serving as a reminder of the incident occurred by the terrible and formidable Coronavirus or COVID-19 that ravaged the whole world with its inescapable webs, impacted the poets to write effectively about its effect on us and literature itself. These poems use vivid descriptions of language to convey the fear of losing, the universal experience of grief and isolating, death, fragility of mental and physical health. This analysis focuses on how this virus became the centre point of discussion whether it was Karma given to people by nature or the consequence of humans' own peculiar deeds.

This paper delves into the experiences of humans during the pandemic and their longing for social communication because of quarantine. As we go on with the effects of this virus, literature becomes the path towards healing and a powerful tool for rectifying emotions. This paper became the tool to negotiate the enduring and shared experiences felt by people at that time.

Keywords: Loss, Fear, Death, Social distance, Isolation, Fragility, Hope amidst chaos, Longing, Stress, Class survival, Displacement, Uncertainty, Disconnection, Confinement, Karma, Quarantine, Communication.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Pandemic Literature refers to the literary works including fiction and non-fiction that explore the themes, impacts and intricacies of pandemics, epidemics and widespread diseases. These provide insights into the psychological, social and cultural impacts of outbreaks on individuals and societies offering a nuanced portrayal of the reflecting themes such as fear, isolation, resilience, loss, the human capacity for hope and connection, societal collapse and human response to the complexities of dealing with public health crises.

The ancient world also features several works on plagues and epidemics. For example, Homer's epic *The Iliad* opens with a plague ravaging the Greek army at Troy, Sophocles's play *Oedipus Rex* begins with a plague hunting the people at the city of Thebes and many more.

COVID-19, or Coronavirus originated from the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China in December, 2019. Since then it has become a devastating element and led to the dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health. Millions of people felt existential threat and many fell into extreme poverty. Even after the pandemic, past trauma was still hovering over people. Now people are looking back at the past and trying to make sense of how it affected us and how our predecessors made it through in a similar way. Throughout history, poets have used their craft to reflect on and respond to the realities of pandemics, offering solace, self-analysis and humans' ability to deal with the complexities of living through a pandemic.

At the forefront of our exploration is Kitty O'Meara's *In The Time Of Pandemic*, a compelling narrative that immerses readers in the intimate struggles and triumphs of individuals navigating a world gripped by disease. This poem also examines how the pandemic healed us which is quite ironic. In *The Same Boat* by Julie Sheldon suggests that fear was the only thing from which no one escaped and all fell into the abyss of this virus. Joseph Goldstein's *Pandemic* takes readers on a journey through the tumultuous landscape of a society grappling with the rapid spread of disease.

In *What If It's Just Nature?* Sheldon questions the world whether the virus is given by Nature to people or the consequences of human deeds. Haroon Rashid, in *We Fell Asleep In One World And Woke Up In Another*, offers a poignant reflection on the profound societal transformations wrought by pandemics. He tries to tell people that after the pandemic the world has changed from the world it used to be, while James Pertwee in *Change*, argues that nothing and everything has changed. Both Sheldon and Goldstein shed light on the condition of the rich and poor during and after the pandemic.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review explores a multifaceted landscape, delving into the nuanced ways in which authors and creators have depicted and interpreted pandemics in various forms of artistic expression.

In the article *Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Mental Health Outcomes among Youth: A Rapid Narrative Review* (2021) by Federica Cielo and his other co-scholars reveal the impact of the pandemic and lockdown measures on young persons for several mental symptoms as well as anxiety, stress, depression, event-specific distress, decrease in psychological wellbeing, and changes in sleep habits. This narrative review points out the negative psychological impact of the pandemic outbreak and the high vulnerability of the young in the development of psychological distress.

A review on *Loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic* (2020) by Tzung-Jeng Hwang, demonstrates how this virus created loneliness. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to implementation of unprecedented “social distancing” strategies crucial to limiting the spread of the virus. But prior to this, the older adults were more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness as they were functionally very dependent on family members or supports. He quotes that *Social distancing should not equate to social disconnection*.

Another article named *Systematic Review of the Literature about the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Lives of School Children* (2020) by J Cachón-Zagalaz with some co-scholars shed light on the psychological impacts of this disease on students. Not only minors but also people have shown the need for attention to their mental health as a result of the anxiety and stress experienced during the pandemic.

Similarly in the article, *A Literature Review on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning* (2021) by Sumitra Pokhrel, determines how this virus has created the largest disruption of education systems in human history. Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have significantly disturbed traditional educational practices.

In the article *A Literature Review of Pandemics and Development: The Long-Term Perspective* (2022), from the original article *Economics of Disasters and Climate Change*,

Beniamino Callegari and Christophe Fedar highlight the connection between pandemics and economic development. They show how the economic inputs are potentially affected by the disease. This literature review collects the main contributions that describe the long-term impact of a pandemic.

A review of this paper could be taken from *Pandemic Fear and Literature: Observations* from Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) which states that even though it was published more than a century ago, this novel feels contemporary because it allows modern readers to reflect on the worldwide fear of pandemics, a fear that remains very much alive even today. This article invites readers to reflect on the ancestral fear of humans toward infectious diseases. Many people used to believe that the plague was one of God's punishments for sins, so the frightening description of its spread was interpreted as a warning to the people to behave morally. This causal relationship between plague and sin is also seen in Greek literary texts, such as Homer's *Iliad* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.

Inclusively, these reviews represent a tapestry of human experiences, psychological impacts, affected education and economic systems and highlight the complex interplay between pandemics and literature.

## **RESEARCH GAP**

While researchers have so far mainly focused on the major elements such as fear, death and the multifaceted long-term psychological impacts of COVID-19 on human psyche, some important strands were left out even by them, the experiences of victims at the time of pandemic in the face of class survival and the predicament of further calamity. There were people who went drastically atrocious and took advantage of the victims and of the indescribable situation. Addressing these research gaps are crucial for preparing for future pandemics and mitigating their impacts on society.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- Who are the victims and who took advantage of those victims and of the callous situation?
- What is class survival and how is it portrayed here ?
- What would have happened if any other cataclysmic would have been altered in the place of COVID-19?
- Would the victims have suffered in the same way they had in this catastrophe or more than this ?

## **OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH**

The paper's Research Objectives intend to accomplish certain goals through the overall study that aims :-

- To scrutinise the problems, which the victims encountered
- To identify the existing class struggle in contemporary society
- To figure out the advantages took by the mischief-makers
- To investigate similar holocaust, which could have left far reaching outcomes on the lives of people

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology in this dissertation paper refers to the systematic approach and techniques that are used to conduct the research. This paper will put forth on the profound coherence of the poems thematically. In the first and second chapter, this paper will involve close reading, interpretation of the poems, thematic analysis, or other literary analysis methods. In the third chapter, the paper will present various aspects of Pandemic literature that will lead to the revelation which the paper seeks to convey.

## CHAPTER - 1

### PEOPLE AS PREY OF PANDEMIC

*Pandemic* by Joseph Goldstein starkly highlights the Buddhist concept of impermanence, demonstrating how quickly life can change and how uncertain our circumstances are. He sheds light on the lives of the rich as well as the poor by stating how the rich are “Sheltered and safe” and “fed and nourished”, “when others are not” suggests the poor. He further questions how to live in such a world that offers “alone and connected” at the same time, as during pandemic, after social distancing, people felt connected with their family members while they felt alone as they were separated from their friends and loved ones. The “dance of fear and love” made people not to look back, as it wasn't nostalgia, unlike a trauma from which moving forward was the only solution to survive as people did not want to return to the past.

*The Same Boat* by Julie Sheldon suggests a situation where individuals, despite their differences, face a common challenge or circumstance. But the poem also makes a comparison between the condition of the rich and poor by comparing them to “sailing crafts”. The rich lived with “comfort, style and ease” while the poor “struggled on their battleships, Where nothing is going right , Endlessly preparing”. But everyone prayed “for a calmer sea” that suggests the calmness of the disaster. Sheldon requested the people to help the needy and guide them in their suffering situation. The poem explores ideas of unity, empathy, shared responsibility, and the human condition's universality, highlighting how these challenges affect everyone regardless of background. It could also focus on personal relationships, showcasing how people can come together to overcome personal adversities.

*In The Time Of Pandemic* by Kitty O'Meara, speaks to the collective pause the world experienced during the pandemic, emphasising introspection, healing, and the potential for societal transformation. It suggests that amidst the fear, isolation, and uncertainty, there was also an opportunity for people to reconnect with themselves, each other, and nature. The poem suggests a period of healing—not just from the virus itself but from the pre-existing conditions of society, including environmental degradation, overconsumption, and social disconnection. The pandemic has the power to bring people closer, fostering a sense of global solidarity and mutual care. The poem also touches on the relationship between humans and

nature, suggesting that the pause in human activity could lead to environmental rejuvenation and a rekindled appreciation for the natural world. It acknowledges the suffering and challenges brought by the pandemic but looks forward to a brighter, more connected future.



## **CHAPTER - 2**

### **PANDEMIC AS AN IRREVERSIBLE CHANGE**

*We Fell Asleep In One World And Woke Up In Another* by Haroon Rashid reflects on the abrupt transformation of everyday life due to the pandemic, emphasising how the world as known to us changed overnight. It speaks to the loss of what was once considered normal and the collective realisation of the fragility of our previous lifestyles. The piece often highlights contrasts, such as bustling cities going quiet, and the sudden importance of staying home over social engagements or travel, underscoring the pandemic's role in redefining priorities and the perception of necessity versus luxury. “Hugs and Kisses suddenly become weapons” illustrates the unimaginable effects of pandemic. The mention of empty skies and clearer waters hints at the environmental impact of reduced human activity, prompting reflection on sustainability and our relationship with the natural world.

*Change* by James Pertwee showcases what the pandemic has changed and what not. Pandemic has changed the whole world where “a trip to the shops” became “a risk-filled mission” and the rich and the poor became mere pawns in the game of “pandemic fear”. Yet nothing has changed. “The sun comes up and the sun goes down”, humanity still alive as people distance themselves, considering it as an act of love, and the rich manage better than the poor, all is as it used to be. Further, Pertwee questions what has changed? Everything and nothing has changed. As the world is in danger as it was before and the panicking, selfish, idiot and kind people continue to survive just as ever before.

*What If It's Just Nature* by Julie Sheldon serves a different perspective on the tragedy. She assumes it to be either “Karma” of people given by Nature or the consequences of humans’ own awful deeds. She argued, what if it's just nature that wants to take back its control questioning the actions of every organism; what if it's just nature that wants us to think about each other and to re- evaluate our time before it's too late to save our planet.

### **CHAPTER - 3**

## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

This chapter would detail the comparative analysis, discussing similarities, differences, and the significance of the poems findings. The poor became the victims while the rich became the mischief-makers who, even after having more than enough, ransacked the impoverished. Both Sheldon and Goldstein illuminated the state of the wealthy and deficient during and after the pandemic. Sheldon suggested that this is a period of healing, which is quite ironic in Joseph's elucidation as pandemic became the reason behind victims' sufferings. Rashid tries to convince the people that after the pandemic the world has changed from the world it used to, while Pertwee argues that nothing has changed. The only thing that remained the same is the fear; the fear of losing loved ones, the fear of contagion, the fear of an uncertain future, and the fear of further calamity.

The manipulation of political power as well the betrayal of masses including removal of organs in the name of vaccinations and treatment, enlargement of goods and products' prices and more tortured the victims to the extent. Changing the cataclysmic event in place of COVID-19 introduces numerous variables influencing outcomes. Alternate crises might exhibit varying transmission rates, mortality profiles, and societal responses, leading to distinct impacts.

Different types of catastrophes—such as natural disasters, nuclear accidents, other pandemics with varying characteristics, or large-scale warfare—would have led to different societal, economic, and health-related outcomes. If the pandemic were caused by a virus with a higher mortality rate but lower transmissibility, the number of deaths could have been higher among those infected, but the spread might have been more contained. While COVID-19 led to widespread social isolation, fear, and mental health issues due to its invisible and highly contagious nature, other disasters might lead to different types of social and psychological stress, including PTSD from direct exposure to traumatic events or grief from sudden, massive losses.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper delves into the multifaceted elements of COVID-19 Pandemic literature through examining contemporary poems that reflect not only the physical impacts but also the long-term psychological impacts of the outbreak. People who were financially corrupted by the wealthy had to face a lot of complications and some had to give up their lives. The rich became merrier while the poor became bothersome for the well-to-do. This shows the class survival, where the rich got all the facilities while the poor were tormented in poverty. Social, political, cultural as well as historical impacts hampered the economic foundation. Common people became the pawns in the game of politics, as the rich always benefited by manipulating the innocents. Even if there would have been another adversity like COVID-19, the victims would have suffered in the same way as it has been going on since ages. But if there is any adversity, people have to carefully defend it with courage and resilience because this is what makes humans a reliable character. Every person has to face their unprecedented consequences which will lead to their self-discovery and will further provide them the will power to prevent any upcoming afflictions.

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